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RUEHNE/AMEMBASSY NEW DELHI 3920
RUEHKP/AMCONSUL KARACHI 0495
RUEHLH/AMCONSUL LAHORE 6232
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SENSITIVE
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SUBJECT: RUCKUS BY LAWYERS BUT LEADERS MOVING ON

REF: ISLAMABAD 2983

¶11. (U) Hundreds of Pakistan's activist lawyers streamed on to the streets of Islamabad October 20 in an impromptu demonstration on behalf of former Supreme Court Chief Justice Iftikhar Chaudhry. Chaudhry had attempted to leave the judicial enclave and travel to the Supreme Court building just blocks away; he had been invited by Supreme Court Bar Association (SCBA) President Aitzaz Ahsan to address the final meeting of the SCBA's executive committee.

¶12. (U) However, all entry points leading to the Supreme Court building, located in the now "red zone," were blocked. Chaudhry's caravan was stopped at a mid-checkpoint for nearly an hour, and the GOP ordered the Supreme Court to be locked and secured. After four-hours delay, Chaudhry finally reached the Court. It took further negotiations with the government before authorities unlocked the building and the mainly ceremonial meeting proceeded.

GOP Flat-footed

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¶13. (U) SCBA's Ahsan took full advantage of the GOP's over-reaction to Chaudhry's trek, calling on his colleagues to hold the organization's last session "in the street" instead. "This is only a tradition that the sitting Chief Justice comes and attends the last session, shares a cup of tea, and gets photographed as a memory," said Ahsan in a slight to Abdul Hameed Dogar, who is recognized by the former and current Pakistani governments as the true Chief Justice.

¶14. (SBU) According to a Geo Staff Reporter, the GOP finally opened the building once the lawyers agreed to refrain from anti-Zardari or anti-government jeers. Reportedly, Information Minister Sherry Rehman still had to intervene with Islamabad Police to allow the media into the building to cover the ceremonies.

Once Inside

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¶15. (U) Addressing the lawyers, Chaudhry claimed he was removed from the bench on November 3, 2007, because he planned to review former President Musharraf's September 12 deportation of opposition leader Nawaz Sharif. Former Prime Minister Shaukat Aziz was supposed to appear before the Court five days after Musharraf declared the state of emergency. Cryptically, Chaudhry said he would "reveal more secrets" on this November 3.

Swan Song?

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¶16. (SBU) Comment: Other than this latest display, it is unclear what additional actions the lawyers could take to restore Chaudhry to the

bench. The GOP is adamant that he not return. PolOff spoke October 20 to Chaudhry's attorney Athar Minallah. He claimed his client still attracted mass support, downplaying the splintering along party lines of several legal fraternities across the country. Minallah was certain SCBA's Ahsan would continue to lead the lawyers' movement, though Ahsan will relinquish in early November the SCBA's presidency, a position of national and international entree and publicity. Ahsan's successor will be elected October 28, and, according to Pakistan People's Party sources, the government is mounting a strong effort to beat Ahsan's favored candidate. Minallah, for his part, is now looking to his next chapter, likely abandoning his practice and starting a non-profit to implement rule of law programs. End comment.

PATTERSON